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HIRAM SIBLEY.

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*AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY R. H. THURSTON,  
DIRECTOR OF SIBLEY COLLEGE, CORNELL UNI-  
VERSITY, JUNE 15, 1892, ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE UNVEILING OF A BUST OF THE  
FOUNDER OF THAT INSTITUTION, IN  
THE CHAPEL OF CORNELL  
UNIVERSITY.*

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## HIRAM SIBLEY.

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The world honors men who have inaugurated great enterprises; it doubly honors men who have made great beginnings of grand social movements. Hiram Sibley was one of those who first and most effectively aided Ezra Cornell in his great beginning of a grand educational evolution. Hiram Sibley shares with Ezra Cornell and his coadjutors and successors that honor which is perpetuated and symbolized by the material part of Cornell University, and it is fitting that he should be given a monument in its chapel, in presence of that erected to the memory of the founder. This would be true had he done no more than promote so well the general welfare of the University in which he came to take so great an interest; but the man who helped make the fortune which the founder so greatly imperiled later in the effort to sustain his splendid enterprise; the man who aided so efficiently in making it possible that Cornell University should be founded; who stood hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, with the founder during his life, and who, after his death, still more effectively promoted the noble work so well begun—this man had his own peculiar and noble work, and did it well.

He was to make the real beginning of the new and special "liberal and practical" education, for the privilege of sustaining which Cornell paid his half million dollars and founded his university. He was to enjoy the privilege of inaugurating an important branch of that education of the "industrial classes" which this University was founded especially to promote, and

which it has become famous for having so well illustrated in its short life of a quarter of a century. It is this which constitutes the great beginning of a great work and which gives Hiram Sibley claim to highest honor. He began, and began well, a noble enterprise for which the world had long been waiting, and which, once inaugurated, was certain, in such a location and under such circumstances, to grow in magnitude and usefulness as long as the fundamental purpose and the aspirations of the founders of the University should be remembered. The bust in the chapel of Cornell University is unveiled as a testimonial of the respect and affection of his colleagues and of the authorities of the University. It will stand unchanged through the centuries, and through all the long years will remind coming generations of students and teachers of their benefactor, and give strangers some idea of the sturdy form and rugged features of the man who gained fame and honor as the organizer of a great telegraphic system, but a fame eclipsed by the brighter glory of the builder of a college for the education of the sons of the people. After all, the real monument is not bust of bronze or limned portrait; nor is it buildings and apparatus of scientific research or of practical work that will most permanently give this man his fame. It is the commencement of the work that constitutes the claim; it will be the constantly growing and never-ending good that comes of it that will raise a monument of constantly increasing magnitude and never-ceasing utility, beside which portrait, bust, or grandest structure will be of little worth.

Aristotle founded a philosophy which is to-day of the past; but the founder is honored by the greatest minds of modern times as a beginner. A great man saw his

opportunity to make a beginning; smaller men complete his work. Herodotus wrote a history; it was a simply told story; but it was the beginning of history, and Herodotus still lives. Copernicus, in his knowledge of astronomy, was a child beside the student of the stars in our time; but he is immortal as the beginner of a true exposition. Newton began the development of the science of mechanics; his "*Principia*" is no longer known in the schools; but no more brilliant fame illuminates our modern time than that of the man who gathered these pebbles on the shore of the ocean of truth. Gilbert began a science of physics and Lavoisier of chemistry, innocent, both, of a knowledge of principles and facts familiar to every intelligent college lad; their names are forever famous. Linnaeus and Buffon and Lyell cleared the way to merely the portals of the paths of modern natural science. We honor them to-day. They will be honored so long as humanity shall move onward and upward. Watt built a first rude steam-engine; Stephenson constructed the beginning of the railway; Morse employed Cornell to lay the first telegraph wire beneath the ground and built the first overhead line, roughly and crudely; but the flash of that first beautiful message, "What hath God wrought!" will be remembered longer than bronze or granite shall endure; Stephenson will never be forgotten and Watt will never need artificial buttress for his intangible monument.

Columbus discovered America; but his glory is not bounded by the narrow limits of Watling Island, nor is his memory lost in four centuries. Columbus discovered a world, gave foundation to a nation, made a history possible to peoples who, through all time, will remember him for his share in the beginning of such

mighty possibilities. The voyages of Thorstein and of Eric were more hazardous than those of Columbus ; the conquests of Cortez and of Pizarro were grander in themselves than the strifes of Columbus ; the growth of the American nation is a more wonderful spectacle than the annexation of Mexico or of Peru to Spain ; but the fame of the discoverer and the beginner of all that four hundred years have seen on this continent, and that the coming ages are to see, looms up out of the historical past in grander and grander proportions as the centuries go by. And thus it is with all famous men. Their fame is measured, not by the greatness of their exertions or of the work performed by them in their own time and by their own strength ; but by the magnitude of the movement which they have begun, and of the results which follow in the years and the centuries which profit by their foresight and wisdom and self-sacrifice.

Thus it is here ; and we honor Hiram Sibley to-day ; not because he gave to Cornell University of his troublesome superfluity of wealth ; not that he erected structures that his own State should have raised as her share of the great work inaugurated by the general government ; not that he made it possible for the nation and the State and Cornell University to make good a promise to the people that neither the State would or the University otherwise could have at the time fulfilled, though the State had contracted with the general government to do so, and the University was ready to do all rightfully asked of it and that lay within its power ; he did all this and more. Yet it is not all this that entitles him to our respect and these tributes. Contributing to Cornell University large sums of money ; making it possible for her to place those buildings on



this beautiful campus which were needed for the work to which she was pledged; giving opportunity to the sons of the farmers and of the mechanics of the State to secure the most practical and liberal education of the time; distributing libraries among colleges, giving schools to the South and the West; aiding the worthy poor in a thousand ways unknown to any one but himself: all these are admirable and beautiful deeds of righteousness; but, while entitling the giver to love and honor, they are nevertheless not, in themselves alone, works which confer highest or most durable fame. We honor Hiram Sibley because, besides all this, he exhibited a foresight and a grasp in his plan which insured a future and continued growth of his beginnings into mighty works for future days and generations. The world had just reached a point at which it was prepared to begin that newer development, in education of the people for the people's needs, anticipated by the wisest men from the earliest days, by Plato, by Aristotle, by Milton, by the Marquis of Worcester, by Comenius, by Richter, by John Scott Russell and by Van Rensselaer, and Lawrence, and Sheffield.

When Ezra Cornell called his old antagonist in business, become his best friend, into the board of trustees of Cornell University, Hiram Sibley saw his opportunity and promptly seized upon it. He took as his share of the work the foundation of the Sibley College of Mechanical Engineering and the Mechanic Arts. He stepped into the place of honor and accepted those duties which the State had failed to perform; and Sibley College became the root and the sustaining trunk of an enterprise of such importance and of such possibilities as even the wise man who founded it probably little realized, even though before his death he had the

pleasure of witnessing its first great expansion. In this splendid work Hiram Sibley had an earnest coadjutor in John L. Morris and his colleagues. He gave the seed, directed its planting, and provided for its cultivation; they did work which fell to them to do, and that beginning was thus made for which we here and now praise and honor the wisdom and liberality of the man who made it all possible at that time and in this place. He was happy in his opportunity, wise in his recognition of it, prompt and forceful in his seizure of it, liberal in his development of it. We are, even now, but beginning to see what that noble work may, if carefully and wisely promoted by his successors and theirs, become. It may easily be made to give to Cornell University the high privilege of becoming the center, for the United States, at least, of all educational work in these latest departments of a "complete and perfect" education; it may yet bring her the distinction, the highest of modern and coming times, of here becoming the mainspring of advances in applied science, the source and the support of the grandest developments of modern life.

Hiram Sibley lived to see this seed take root, to see the germination of the plant, and to witness a growth far beyond the limits which had been anticipated by him as possible within his lifetime. He saw it become a sturdy sapling; we have seen it within these few years grow to the altitude and the amplitude of a healthy young tree, splitting its bark in its rapid development of new leaves and fresh twigs and wide-spreading branches and swelling trunk. But not the foresight of the founder himself, not the best judgment of his wisest successor, shall say where or when its growth shall cease, if well cared for. Give the young

tree room for growth, a wholesome soil, and a healthy atmosphere in which to expand, and generations shall be astonished by its continued rise and spread, and its most earnest detractors shall be converted to admiration and to helpful sympathy by its good fruits and healthful influence.

Its roots and its branches already need more room, the soil is good and the atmosphere better than is usual; but more space, further enriching of the soil, more room for the branches, and a still more healthful atmosphere are to be hoped for. These given, the value and the magnitude of Hiram Sibley's gift to Cornell University, to his State, to the nation, and to the world, will never cease to impress more and more every friend of technical and liberal education with its usefulness, its importance, and its growth in all that constitutes a real basis for the fame of its founder.

Sibley College began twenty years ago as the germ of a struggling school of the mechanic arts, a higher sort of manual training school appended to a mixed course of instruction, neither an educational course nor a technical course in the full sense of the modern terms. Its students, half educated, half trained professionally, went out into a world less educated, less well trained, and made their several marks with force and decision, and began effectively to build up the reputation of their teachers and their alma mater. In the year 1885, its progress was such as to justify its organization into a technical college of the highest type, and in three years more it had outgrown its boundaries, and its founder had the satisfaction of seeing it necessary to limit the entering classes while awaiting enlargement of its buildings. This done, he saw, before his death, in the following year, a renewed growth of unprecedented

rapidity. The course had, meantime, been made a professional one, with work at least a year above that ordinarily given in such courses, and such that graduates of technical schools in good standing find a full year often necessary for satisfactory prosecution of their work for the first degree.

To-day, this memorial of our friend, of the founder of Sibley College, is placed in presence of a hundred young men prepared to graduate from among five hundred beneficiaries of his noble work. The buildings erected by him, extensive as they are, are more than crowded with students, and double their capacity would be none too much for the coming years of this decade.

They are filled to overflowing with the most extensive equipment of its kind in the world, given by Hiram Sibley, by a hundred friends of his enterprise, and by his appreciative successors; yet double this unique outfit could well be utilized to-day, and no one can say what opportunity may come for still larger extension. A hundred farmers' sons, a hundred sons of mechanics, hundreds of the most ambitious of the young men of the day, are flocking to share this bounty. Hiram Sibley has indeed made a grand beginning, and it now remains for the nation, the State, and all the friends of this, the greatest of the great social movements of our time, to fittingly supplement his work.

This great work has another aspect still, which makes it a source of higher honor to Sibley and to his coadjutors than even that which we have just viewed so briefly. When the young senator of the State of New York accepted the first presidency of Cornell University, he came, not to do the routine work of the college president of a long established and slowly changing institution of classic learning, great and honorable as that

grand work unquestionably is. He sought not the opportunity of promoting "the liberal and practical education" of the "industrial classes" alone, novel and mighty and attractive as such work must have been to every statesman and every thinking man of his time. He came to aid Ezra Cornell in organizing a "people's university," in the sense that it was to be a real, an all-embracing university, offering all the elements of complete and perfect education to all classes of people. He came to perform his splendid part in the erection of a true university; the like of which had been dreamed of, in misty and undefined form, by many a great soul in earlier days, but which had never before become concrete. This was work for a president of a great university that might well attract any patriotic, wise, and far-seeing man from even a greater work than that of making laws for the State or even for the nation.

When Henry W. Sage built the Sage College for Women, he added another element which brought Cornell University more nearly into perfect and complete form, which gave more nearly perfect symmetry of organization than had been attained by any earlier structure of this sort in the history of the world. When the same strong hand aided the University in its up-building by the erection of the Sage School of Philosophy, it was but another and grander approximation to that perfection and completeness. When the same hand, so often before working with White and Sibley and McGraw, in a common and glorious task, erected the library which stands, as a magnificent memorial of good sought to be done, in the midst of these great buildings and on the edge of our beautiful campus, he gave a great and radiant center to the complete system which was gradually becoming evolved from the earlier educational chaos.

The enlarged departments, and the growth of the material and visible university, under the skilful guiding hands of the newly adjusted administration, promoted by the unprecedented labors of a still too small faculty, came forward with astonishing rapidity to give example to the world of that Miltonian education which the blind poet dreamed of as "complete and perfect."

How great the work here so well begun may be inferred when it is said that, to educate the existing body of American youth as well as portions of the world are already prepared to educate their coming men, there should be founded, in the United States, to-day, no less than twenty technical universities, fifty trade schools, and two thousand high schools, including manual training and the "*slojd*" systems in their curricula and preparation; while two thousand professors, with twenty-five thousand students, twenty thousand teachers and a half million scholars, should be receiving these untold blessings. A million boys are now growing up, needing and rightfully demanding of the nation this privilege of a complete and perfect education for their coming lives. The opportunity is still boundless, and many Cornells, many Sibleys, and countless lesser benefactors, are coming forward, in the early future, to seize each his share; but these men who made the beginnings are those who will be longest and most honored.

Millions will, in future years, be contributed to the purposes of Cornell University; but the first \$25,000 that Ezra Cornell paid for the privilege of giving to the State of New York his first half million will count far more than all. New schools will be added to old schools, and the University will be thus expanded to cover the world of culture; but their builders will not

be rated with Columbus. Presidents will come in long procession as the centuries pass, but they who head the line, though the most distant of all, will be best remembered as the inaugurators of the work. Buildings will rise about these lovely lawns, and among the fields beyond; but the pioneer builders are those to be longest famous.

The founder of Sibley College, as one of the vital organs of the great body of Cornell University, gave hundreds of thousands of dollars to the cause of education here and elsewhere, millions, very likely, to unnumbered and unknown charities and philanthropies; for that generous disposition of the fortune intrusted to him we give him due credit. He gave a mass of buildings and a forest of tools that the purpose of the university and the aspirations of its founder might be, to that degree, satisfied; for this his name is made for all time a household word among the youth of coming generations. He gave time and thought and earnest support and wisest counsel to the conductors of this mighty enterprise; for this he is entitled to the gratitude of every friend of the people, of every friend of every phase of education. But that which includes all and best entitles Hiram Sibley to praise, to highest honor, to most enduring fame, is that he made the grand beginning of a glorious and mighty work. It is as the founder, as the *Beginner*, that so much of immortality as can be given by mortals is rightfully claimed for Hiram Sibley.







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